



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**COMPLEMENTARY THERAPY AS AN APPROACH IN  
MANAGING OCCUPATIONAL STRESS**

**Nur Aishah Binti Nor Hashim**

**Bachelor of Science with Honours  
(Human Resource Development)  
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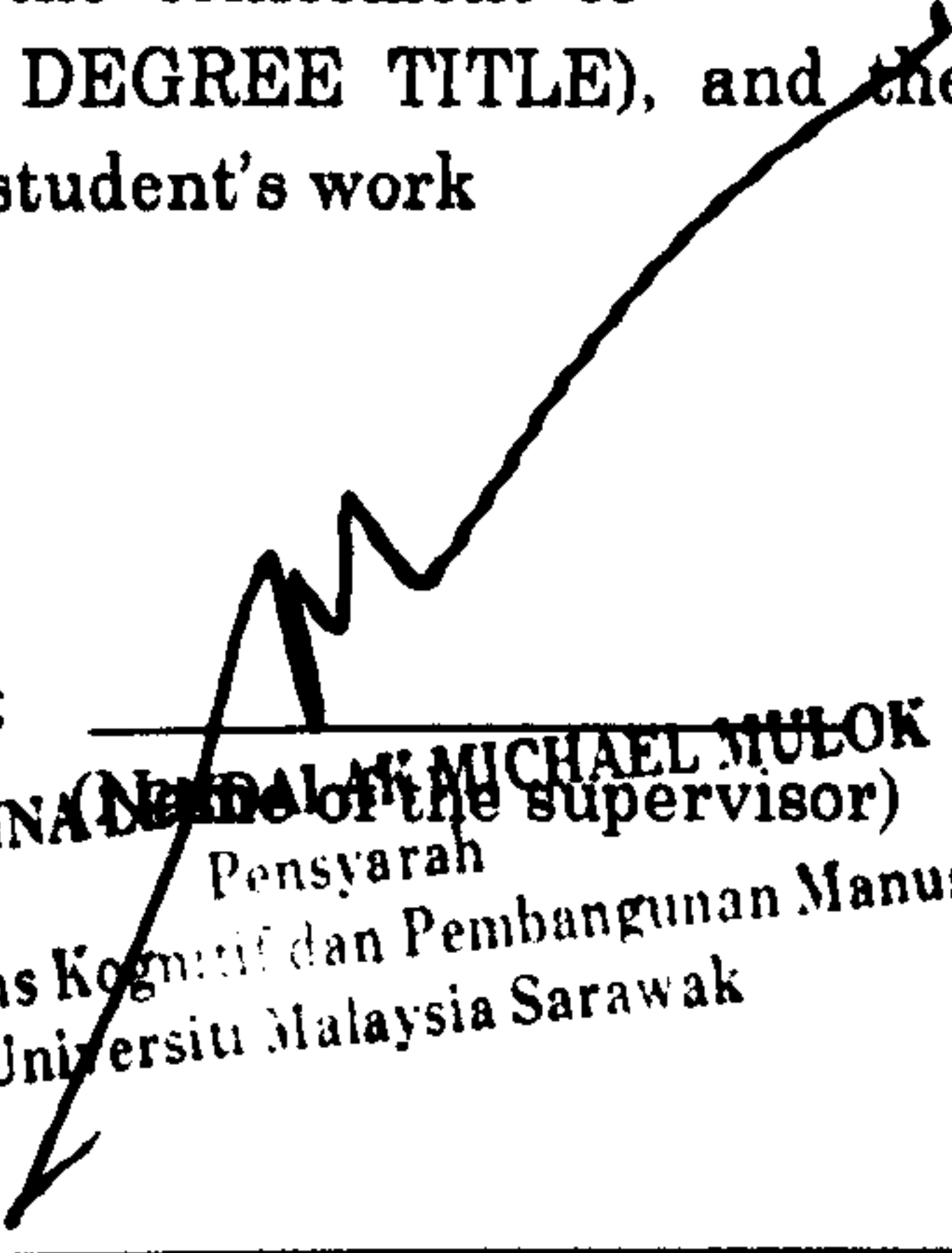
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**COMPLEMENTARY THERAPY AS AN APPROACH IN MANAGING  
OCCUPATIONAL STRESS**

**NUR AISHAH BINTI NOR HASHIM**

**This project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a  
Bachelor of Science with Honours  
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**Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development  
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK  
2015**

**RAWATAN KOMPLEMENTARI SEBAGAI CARA MENANGANI  
MASALAH TEKANAN TEMPAT KERJA**

**NUR AISHAH BINTI NOR HASHIM**

**Projek ini merupakan salah satu keperluan untuk  
Ijazah Sarjana Muda Sains dengan Kepujian  
Pembangunan Sumber Manusia**

**Fakulti Sains Kognitif dan Pembangunan Manusia  
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2015**

The project entitled 'Complementary Therapy as an Approach in Managing Occupational Stress' was prepared by Nur Aishah Binti Nor Hashim and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Science with Honours Human Resource Development.

Received for examination by:

-----  
FLORI ANNA LENDAT AK MICHAEL MULOK  
Florianna Michael Mulok  
Fakulti Sains Kognitif dan Pendidikan Manusia  
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia  
Date:

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## **ABSTRAK**

### **RAWATAN KOMPLEMENTARI SEBAGAI CARA MENANGANI MASALAH TEKANAN TEMPAT KERJA**

Nur Aishah Binti Nor Hashim

*Masalah tekanan kerja tempat kerja berpunca dari pelbagai sebab, antaranya ialah bebanan kerja dan waktu bekerja yang panjang. Oleh itu, isu tekanan tempat kerja ini telah mendapat perhatian daripada pengamal keselamatan di tempat kerja yang menjurus kepada kesedaran tentang pentingnya kesihatan mental di tempat kerja. Di samping itu, terdapat satu trend terhadap penggunaan aktiviti kesihatan dalam mengubati penyakit psikologi dan fizikal yang dikenali sebagai rawatan komplementari. Rawatan tersebut juga boleh dikenali sebagai rawatan selain dari rawatan kotemporari. Antara contoh-contohnya ialah Yoga, Aromaterapi, Qi Gong, dan Ruqyah. Dengan itu, kajian ini memberi satu perspektif baru dalam menggunakan rawatan komplementari sebagai solusi kepada masalah tekanan tempat kerja. 5 pengamal rawatan komplementari terapi digunakan sebagai sumber hasil kajian melalui kaedah temu bual dan borang soal selidik dalam memenuhi kehendak persoalan kajian. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengetahui persepsi terhadap penggunaan rawatan komplementari, mengenalpasti jenis rawatan yang boleh dilakukan untuk menangani masalah tekanan dan mengetahui bagaimana rawatan komplementari mempengaruhi masalah tekanan tempat kerja. Kajian mendapati bahawa rawatan komplementari terapi sangat bermanfaat memandangkan rawatan tersebut secara menyeluruh, semula jadi, dan lebih berkesan dalam meningkatkan kesihatan mental, fizikal dan emosi.*

## **ABSTRACT**

### **COMPLEMENTARY THERAPY AS AN APPROACH IN MANAGING OCCUPATIONAL STRESS**

Nur Aishah Binti Nor Hashim

Occupational stress is caused by various reasons such as workload and long working hours. Thus, numerous Occupational Safety and Health practitioner have showed a concern towards occupational stress issue and started on promoting mental health awareness at workplace. Meanwhile, there is an occurrence of trend in using wellness activities to treat physical and psychological illness which is known as complementary therapy. It is a type of treatment which can also be described as a non conventional medicine. Some of the examples are Yoga, Aromatherapy, Qi gong, and Islamic Medical Practices (Ruqyah). Therefore, this research offered a perspective on the use of complementary therapies as a tool in improving and maintaining mental health condition of employees. 5 complementary therapy practitioners were interviewed and distributed with questionnaires for this study to satisfy the research objectives on identifying the perceptions towards the use of complementary therapy, to identify what are the type of therapy that can be practiced to reduce stress and how do the therapies affect occupational stress. It is found that complementary therapy is very beneficial as it act as a holistic treatment, natural way of healing and more empowering as it helps to improve employee's mental, emotional and physical health.



## **CHAPTER 1**

### ***INTRODUCTION***

#### **1.0 Introduction**

In chapter 1, a brief background of the research is described. It is then followed by the discussion of problem statements, and the objectives centered in the study. Subsequently, the research is developed into several research questions. The significance of the study and limitations of the study are also discussed in this chapter. The final part of this chapter explained on the critical terms used in the study.

#### **1.1 Background of study**

Occupational stress is caused by various types of stressors such as workload, long working hours, role ambiguity and role conflict experienced by employees (Johnson, Cooper, Cartwright, Donald, Taylor, & Millet, 2005). Thus, these circumstances lead to depression, anxiety, work-related stress, burnout and absenteeism. According to World Health Organization (2005), at any given time, 450 million people suffered from mental or brain disorder while 121 million people suffered from depression. Additionally, a few international reports are promoting awareness on mental health particularly at workplace. Therefore, this study offered a

perspective on the use of complementary therapy as a tool in improving and maintaining mental health specifically at workplace. Complementary therapy is a type of treatment which can also be described as a non conventional medicine. Complementary therapy is used to treat various illnesses either physical illnesses or psychological illness. It is intended to maintain and improves mental and physical well being of individuals. It is also to prevent mental and physical illnesses. According to Traditional & Complementary Medicine Ministry of Health Malaysia (2011), complementary therapy may be biological based or mind body based. The commonly used complementary therapies are music therapy, relaxation technique, acupuncture, mindfulness meditation, aromatherapy, massage, yoga, Tai chi, Qi gong and massage therapy. Each of the complementary therapy is used differently to treat various illnesses from physical to mental related illnesses. Hence, this research focused on complementary therapy as a method in managing occupational stress at workplace.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Formerly, World Health Organization (2005) announced that 450 million people are suffering from mental related disorder, and 815 000 people out of 10 to 20 million committed suicide each year. Although the contributing factors toward mental related disorder vary, one of the contributing factors of mental related disorder is occupational stress. Stress related to workplace is known as occupational stress. Lately, occupational stress awareness has increased among several organizations. Numerous Occupational Safety and Health organizations have showed a concern towards the mental health well being among employee. \

In 2013, Canada became the first country to amend a standard for Psychological Health and Safety at Workplace known as CAN/CSA-Z1003-13/BNQ9700-803/2013 (Markiewicz, 2013). Subsequently, The Health Ministry Mental Health Promotion Advisory Council member Lee (2014) stated that established companies with more than 40 workers should not just amend policies



regarding physical fitness only but to also include mental health well being in their policies. This showed how psychological well being of employees at the workplace particularly occupational stress is being emphasized. This issue should not be disregarded by organizations. Therefore, several approaches are initiated at the workplace in improving the mental health of employees as suggested by European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2014) such as stress management training, health circles and free counselling session for employees.

Additionally, a case study was conducted by European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2014) on innovative approaches to mental health promotion at workplace including “The story-telling approach”, health-related individual interview, and financial support for employees facing crisis. However, there is no known study that has exploits the use of complementary therapy at the workplace as an approach in maintaining, and improving the mental health of employees. Hence, there is a need to explore the perceptions on the use complementary therapy practices to address the issue of occupational stress.

Traditional and complementary medicine has showed a significant demand across different countries. The World Health Organization (2005) has discovered an increase of over 30% demands for complementary health professionals such as acupuncturist, chiropractors and naturopaths from the year 1995 to 2005, which leads to the development of Traditional and Complementary Medicine Strategy for 2014 to 2023. The report is intended to provide knowledge, managing practices, quality and safety assurance and proper universal promotion of traditional and complementary medicine. This proved that traditional and complementary medicines have emerged as a trend in the health care industry.

Consequently, the World Health Organization also has published a service guidance package for mental health policy in 2005, known as Mental Health Policies and Programmes in the Workplace. Nevertheless, there is no known study that specifically focused on complementary therapy practices that can be conducted by

employees to address occupational stress issue. Hence, there is a need to study the complementary therapy activities that can practiced by the employees to reduce stress.

Complementary therapy is proved to be effective among several diseases such as HIV/AIDS, cancer, malaria, SARS, hepatitis B and most crucially in mental health disorders including insomnia, anxiety and depression (Abuduli, Ezat & Aljunid, 2011). Furthermore, Abuduli, Ezad and Aljunid (2011) stated that traditional and complementary therapy is suggested in Shenyang, China to the 75% of all chronic illness and 99% for all psychiatric illness.

According to Park (2013), the most commonly used complementary therapy used in the United States in 2007 were deep breathing exercises (12.7%), meditation (9.4%), massage (8.3%), yoga (6.1%) and natural products (17.7%). The growing interest toward complementary therapy is the results of awareness and crucial role of psychological distress (Park, 2013). Despite the use of complementary therapy practices by health practitioner in the field of psychology, there is no known study that has specifically looked into the effects of complementary practices towards occupational stress. Thus, there is a need to study on the effects of complementary therapies on occupational stress.

### **1.3 Research objectives**

#### **Main Objective**

- To provide an overview of complementary therapy as an approach in handling occupational stress issue.

#### **Specific Objectives**

- To study the perceptions on the use of complementary therapy.
- To identify the complementary therapy activities that can be practiced by employees to reduce stress.

- To discover the effects of complementary therapy on occupational stress.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

- What are the perceived perceptions towards the use complementary therapy?
- What are the complementary activities that can be practiced to reduce stress?
- How do complementary therapy activities affect employee's occupational stress?

#### **1.5 Significance of Study**

This research is expected to contribute to the existing knowledge of mental health issues at workplace as well as to the knowledge of Occupational Safety and Health practices. As there are numerous psychosocial researchers, there are abundant of theories and concepts regarding occupational stress issue. Thus, this study suggested a solution in managing occupational stress at workplace. This research focused on the use of complementary therapy in nurturing positive mental health activities for employees at their workplace. This study also offered an understanding on the perceptions, practices, and the effects of complementary therapy in addressing occupational stress issue.

The findings from this study contributed to the organizations specifically to Occupational Safety and Health officers in controlling mental health issues particularly occupational stress. In relation to this, the findings from this study are compared to the literature review from the previous research. Therefore, as this study attempted to fill the gaps of the previous findings, the findings obtained from this study act as an existing evidence and support for the related theories and concepts.

This study also should be encountered by the Occupational Safety and Health practitioner in considering the importance of complementary therapy in nurturing positive mental health practices within an organization.



## **1.6 Definition of terms**

### **Stress**

**Conceptual:** Larson (2004) defined stress as a mobilization of body response towards unpleasant situation.

**Operational:** Occupational stress can be explained by the changes experience by employees in physical, mental or emotion that seeks for adjustments. It may occur among the employee when they cannot cope with the situation that is out of control. It would easily cause individual bodily or mental illness which affects individual's health, productivity, and quality at workplace (Raitano & Kleiner, 2004)

### **Complementary Therapy**

**Conceptual-** Park (2013) defined complementary therapy as a health treatment to complement the existing conventional medicine which covers a holistic view of health and relations between mind and body.

**Operational-** The complementary therapy is the health practices aside from the convectional medicines.

### **Mental health**

**Conceptual-** According to World Health Organization (2005), mental health is defined as the individual state of wellbeing of being aware of their abilities, capability to manage common stressors of life, ability to be productive and contribute to the community.

**Operational-** refers to employees' mental wellbeing in coping with job stressors closely related to their job performance at workplace.

## **1.7 Limitations of the study**

This study focused on the mental health issues faced by the Occupational Safety and Health practitioners in organizations. Therefore, other issues in

Occupational Safety and Health practitioners are not included as the remaining issues may need different approaches of solving the issues. The mental health issue discussed in this study is intended for the purpose of Occupational Safety and Health practices. Mental health issue that is being highlighted in this study is occupational stress which governs the area of work-related stress, depression and anxiety. Hence, the findings from this study are only applicable to the stated occupational stress issue only.

This study also centred the practices of complementary therapy. Thus, other mental health practices besides complementary therapy are not covered in this study. Inclusion of other health practices will create a significant difference on the findings.

Another limitation in this study is the areas covered by this study. The area of research interest is narrowed to the perceptions of complementary therapy, type of complementary therapy practices, and the effects of complementary therapy towards employee's occupational stress at workplace. Other areas such as barriers towards implementation or factors leading to the practices are not covered in this study.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### ***LITERATURE REVIEW***

#### **2.0 Introduction**

Chapter 2 is the discussions on available literature related to this study. The previous literature that is being reviewed and discussed in this chapter is focused on the literature regarding occupational stress and complementary therapy.

#### **2.1 Occupational Stress**

In defining stress, there was an inconsistency in the terminology used, indefinite use of the stress term, and biases on the methodological method used in related study (Putwain, 2007). This is supported by the statement of Abdin (2008) that stress has been defined differently by researches according to their respective field of study such as psychological, bio medical, medical, management and social sciences. Therefore in psychology, Juniper (2003) defined stress as a dysfunctional, physiological response from the excessive intuitive demands or inordinate emotional challenges. Thus, Juniper (1991) grouped stress into three distinguishable symptoms which are tension, depression and compulsion (as cited in Juniper, 2003). On the other hand, threatening events can cause individual to manifest their stress through



emotional, behavioural or physiological actions (Passe, 2007). Besides, others also defined stress as a condition that occurs through individual cognitive interpretation towards environment that act as stressors or stress inducing (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, n.d). However, Moustaka and Constatinidis (2010) claimed that stress is a state not an illness.

Relatively, work related stress can be defined as when an employee unable to cope with or control workplace demands (Panzaru & Stefanescu, n.d). Job stress is when environmental condition creates a physical or emotional demand that seeks for adaptive response by the employee (Choi, Tan, Teoh & Muthuvelo, 2014). This is also supported by the statement of Jamal (2011) whereby job stress is caused by extreme aversive nature to employee that creates a lethal work environment which forces employees to use an amount of time and energy to cope with the situation.

Moreover, occupational stress arise from the interactions of several factors which are the type of work, work stressors, degree of support, and coping mechanism (Johnson, Cooper, Cartwright, Donald, Taylor & Millet, 2005). Thus, results experienced by an employee due to a series of work demands will lead to a series of outcomes concerning health such as illness, injury or behavioural changes (Moustaka & Constantinidis, 2010). Gulavani and Shinde (2014) also emphasized that emotional exhaustion and depolarization are significantly related with occupational stress. Based on the available literature, it can be seen that the terms of work related stress, occupational stress and job stress are interchangeably used. Nevertheless, it leads to same direction of stress which occurs and cause by the workplace.

The common mental health disorder is depression and anxiety. Depression can be defined as individual's dissatisfaction of a situation (Gray, 2008). A Study showed that psychological job demand, job insecurity and hazardous working environment are correlated with depression (Edimansyah, Rusli, Naing, Rusli, Winn & Ariff, 2008). Another study also showed that there is a significant relationship

between the risk factors of job related depression with low social support and psychological demands (Aziah, Rusli, Winn, Naing & Tengku, 2004). Moreover, Manthorpe, Stanley, and Caan (2006) mentioned that the causes of work depression among managers are domestic relationships, genetic tendencies and financial problems. As organizational lethal working environment develop depression among their workers, it will affect the health of the individuals and the company (Aziah, Rusli, Winn, Naing & Tengku, 2004). Depression also has the tendency to ruin family relationships, friendships and body functions and often prone to suicide (Collinson, 2004). Hence, work related depression should be taken critically as it is a clinical illness (Aziah, Rusli, Winn, Naing & Tengku, 2004). Conversely, individual can be disabled by depression but it does not change the individual capability and ability (Gray, 2008). Therefore, Arocena and Nunez (2014) suggested that, work depression should be compensated with positive psychological effect of success.

Obholzer (1994) stated that there are three levels of anxiety (as cited in James & Clark, 2002). The three levels of work related anxiety concerned the task which generate anxiety, employee personal histories that generate anxiety and anxiety that is develop from primitive level (James & Clark, 2002). Occurrence of anxiety, depression, and other psychological problems among employees has caused a direct impact in either the health of employees or economic consequences through sickness absence and low productivity (Evans et al., 2012). Samad, Hashim, Moin and Abdullah (2010) claimed that negative working environment such as overload task, insufficient resources and job demands leads to anxiety. Meanwhile Shain (1999) also emphasized that adverse working environment has a high tendency towards health effects such as higher rates of anxiety.

In Malaysia, occupational stress issue is critical. This is due to the social and economic forces that has impacted the work environment of Malaysian and created new career challenges (Idris, Dollard, & Winefield, 2010). A study conducted by Regus (2013) among business owners and senior executives showed that 48% of the Malaysian respondent had experienced a rise in stress levels and 42% of the